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ABSTRACT

This British Library Research and Development Department study assesses current activities and attitudes toward quality management in library and information services (LIS) in the academic sector as well as the commercial/industrial sector. Definitions and types of benchmarking are described, and the relevance of benchmarking to LIS is evaluated. Study methodology and interim findings of the ongoing project are detailed. A survey found that the 53% of respondents have no formal policy on quality. While benchmarking is used by only 7% of respondents, 81% utilize user feedback is utilized to measure and evaluate performance. Examples of current practice reveal the problems faced by LIS in both the academic and commercial sectors. Benchmarking is a "quality" tool which should form part of an overall quality program aimed at improving services. Quality management is considered beneficial to the library and information sector, but a model suiting the exact needs of the sector has not yet been identified. Appendices include study methodology; definitions; procedure; types of benchmarking; relevance; graphical representation of survey responses; how quality policies are communicated to LIS staff; the European Model for Total Quality; and future publication information. (Contains 12 references.) (SWC)

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Benchmarking and its Relevance to the Library & Information Sector

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Benchmarking and its Relevance to the Library and Information Sector

Interim findings of 'Best Practice Benchmarking in the Library and Information Sector', a British Library Research and Development Department project

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Abstract

This paper details the interim findings of a one-year British Library Research and Development Department research project entitled: Best Practice Benchmarking in the Library and Information Sector.

Definitions and types of benchmarking are described, and the relevance of benchmarking to Library and Information Services (LIS), is evaluated.

The aim of the project is to assess current activities and attitudes to quality management in LIS in the academic sector, and in a sample taken from the commercial/industrial sector. Benchmarking is seen as one of a range of 'quality' tools which might be of practical use to the LIS sector. Benchmarking techniques are being tested so that their relevance and utility to the information sector can be assessed.

The methodologies used throughout the research project, and the interim findings to date, are detailed. The questionnaire survey found that the majority of respondents have no written formal policy on quality, whilst benchmarking is used by 7% of respondents. However, user feedback is a popular method of measuring and evaluating performance, with 81% of respondents claiming to use it. Examples of current practice, gathered at the follow-up telephone interview phase of the project, reveal the problems faced by LIS, in both the academic and commercial sectors.

The paper concludes that benchmarking is a 'quality' tool which should form part of an overall quality programme, aimed at improving services. Quality management is considered to be beneficial to the library and information sector, but a model which is in harmony with the needs of the sector has not yet been identified. The self-assessment model, as developed by the British Quality Foundation (BQF) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), has been identified as the most appropriate model for the information sector at the present time, although further research would be necessary before it could be considered for adoption.

Introduction

The concept of benchmarking has become significant for library and information services (LIS) with the growing recognition that quality management principles and practices provide the means to delivery of effective services in the current climate of increased accountability and dwindling resources (Mullen, 1993; Lawes, 1993).

Successful companies have demonstrated that benchmarking can be a useful tool for implementing quality management in the equally demanding operating environment of the business sector. Rank Xerox is the company most commonly associated with the successful use of benchmarking techniques; in 1979 they introduced benchmarking to establish how their competitors had achieved success, and then emulated them. According to one leading authority on quality, benchmarking is now widely credited with being one of the main factors responsible for improvements in company performance (Zairi and Hutton, 1995). It is against this background of intensifying use of benchmarking activity in the commercial world that benchmarking for LIS is being considered.

The Project

Loughborough University of Technology is engaged on a one-year project for the British Library Research and Development Department (BLRD&D) to investigate the viability of benchmarking techniques for the library and information sector. The project began in November 1994 and ends in December 1995. The team comprises: Margaret Kinnell Evans, as Project Director; Penny Garrod, as Researcher; together with John Brockman, Quality Manager at the Ministry of Defence Headquarters Library, London, and Alan Gilchrist of Gavel Con-

sultancy. The latter are respectively the Secretary and Chair of the Quality Issues special interest group of the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID/QI). FID will soon be publishing, jointly with BLRD&D, a select bibliography of quality management items compiled by the Loughborough benchmarking team.

The aim of the project is to assess the levels of quality management activities within the sector, with special reference to academic and special LIS. Benchmarking is one of a range of approaches available, with attitudes to quality management in general, and to benchmarking in particular, also being investigated. Barriers to change, which may be limiting current levels of activity on quality issues in the library and information sector, are being identified, whilst the beneficial effects of implementing quality programmes are being highlighted as a way of overcoming the problems of limited resources and customer dissatisfaction. The project is complemented by the Quality Management and Public Libraries study, also funded by BLRD&D, and jointly being undertaken by Sheffield and Loughborough Universities. The data collection for this project is designed to provide some basis for comparing quality management practices across the whole of the LIS sector.

Methodology

a) SURVEYS

A questionnaire survey was undertaken to establish current levels of quality related activities in the library and information sector. All library and information services in the higher education sector, and a sample of 197 information units from the commercial/industrial sector, were surveyed. The overall target group was 511 library and information services. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to state whether they were prepared to take part in a follow-up telephone interview. A sample of those who agreed to this has been interviewed to date.

b) LITERATURE SEARCHING

Literature searching has been an ongoing process for the duration of the project. New items on quality related issues are constantly being published, as the topic is highly dynamic and subject to constant review and criticism. Literature searching has so far concentrated on identifying items for inclusion in the select bibliography, which is soon to be published, and surveying previous research in the field to supply data for an interim position paper. Searching in the area of quality management is made difficult by the proliferation of terms used eg. performance measurement/performance indicators; quality management/total quality management; quality systems/quality standards etc. This abundance of jargon-laden terminology, and varied definitions, represents one of the major barriers to the implementation of quality programmes.

Coopers and Lybrand have carried out two surveys into the use of benchmarking: one in the United Kingdom in 1993, and one in Europe in 1994 (Coopers . . , 1993, 1994). The first of these revealed that out of 105 UK respondents, comprising directors drawn from the Times Top 1,000 list of manufacturing and service companies, 67% claimed currently to be benchmarking. The second survey involved major companies from The Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, France and the UK. Once again, benchmarking was used as a management tool by 72% of respondents; for the UK alone the figure was 78%. More importantly, 86% of UK respondents in the European survey stated that they had learned lessons from benchmarking activities. These activities are important if the concept of 'The Learning Organisation' is to become a reality. One of the frequently reported benefits of benchmarking is its ability to heighten awareness of internal processes and communications; this in turn facilitates identification of areas where improvements can be made.

However, benchmarking is a difficult concept to put into practice, especially for those in the service sector where there are no tangible products, and there are many variables, which renders comparisons difficult. Benchmarking is now being referred to in government literature as a 'challenge' (Department . . , 1995). Whilst the government, the Confederation of British Industries (CBI), and other influential bodies exhort all organisations, irrespective of size and industry, to adopt benchmarking techniques, others are cautioning that it is not an easy task, and that it cannot be achieved overnight (Bullivant, 1994, ch.1 p.53). Smaller organisations which have tried benchmarking have yet to confirm whether it has been successful or not. However, they do affirm that it has been a useful learning exercise.

A 1992 report from the USA sees benchmarking as benefiting only the higher performing organisations (Ernst and Young . . , 1993). The authors of the American study relate the failure of benchmarking in lower and medium performing organisations to their choice of inappropriate models for comparison. These models tend to be the 'best of the best,' whose practices are ineffective

when adopted by lower performing organisations. Instead, the authors suggest that lower performers should concentrate their resources on their 'core infrastructure', rather than waste them on what they term 'sophisticated practices'. The extent to which the findings of this study has relevance for the LIS sector has yet to be tested, although the present project will consider them. Identifying 'higher' and 'lower' performing organisations in LIS is problematic, given the lack of objective criteria for success. However, certain factors can be seen as significant to ensure that LIS are compared on equal terms. Size and annual budget are two of the more obvious, as is the experience of quality management in the organisation. It seems unnecessary, for example, to point out that it would be unwise for a small HE college library, with no quality programme in place, to attempt a comparison with a large, university library, where total quality management (TQM) had been implemented some time ago.

c) 'DEMONSTRATOR' PROJECTS

Three 'demonstrator' projects have been set up, consisting of library and information units which have volunteered to undertake a benchmarking exercise for the project. These organisations represent a cross-section of the academic, public and commercial sectors. Each 'demonstrator' project has selected a key process for benchmarking purposes; these are processes which they perceive to be essential to the success of their particular unit or organisation. Benchmarking partners are in process of being identified and contacted, as the next phase of the process is entered.

The aim of this element in the methodology is to put benchmarking into practice, and thereby to assess its relevance to the library and information sector. As well as providing valuable data for the benchmarking project, the exercise should provide an insight into the type of problems which LIS may encounter, when trying to implement benchmarking techniques. The organisations involved will report on any learning experiences they have had, and whether the methods used were appropriate for their particular organisational culture. A subsequent analysis of these data will enable the benchmarking team to establish the viability of benchmarking for the library and information sector, and evaluate how it can best be adapted to this environment.

Definitions

There are many definitions and several types of benchmarking. Definitions range from the general to the specific, and many of them originate from well-known authorities or 'gurus' on quality management, such as Robert Camp and John Bullivant (Camp, 1989 and Bullivant,1994). However, a definition which is relevant and meaningful to the library and information sector is needed. As far as the various types of benchmarking are concerned, one of the aims of this project is to evaluate these models, in order to identify those which are best suited to the LIS sector. Two key concepts, which should be kept in mind when grappling with the many definitions, are: Measurement and Comparison. The term 'benchmark' has its origins in industrial practice, and is synonymous with inspection and tangible products. However, it is now widely used to mean anything taken as a point of reference or comparison.

The 'demonstrator' organisations are currently in process of testing benchmarking techniques for the project using the concepts of measurement and comparison in tangible ways. Their experiences will provide valuable data on the practicalities of benchmarking for the LIS sector.

The following example provides a concrete example of the way in which benchmarking can be applied to a library and information service. The demonstrator projects are basing their activities on these procedures:

Checklist of procedures

- Identifying a process which is critical to the success of the library and information service (LIS) eg. an enquiry or interlibrary loans service.
- Documenting or mapping the sub-processes, which are carried out as part of this process.
- Taking measurements of those factors which are deemed critical to the success of the process, eg. the speed of document delivery, or the relevance of a response to an enquiry.
- Analysing the results of this exercise.
- Choosing and then visiting benchmarking partners, in order to compare the results with other organisations using a similar process.
- Identifying 'best practice', ie. methods used by benchmarking partners which can be adopted in order to improve one's own level of service.

Types of Benchmarking

Five main categories of benchmarking have been cited in the literature:

1. Competitor - comparing with leading organisations with similar products or services and

adopting their approach. This method is suited to the with-profit sector, but the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also recommend its use by organisations providing the same services, but where there is no competition on a commercial basis, eg. NHS trusts, government departments, and universities (Department . . . March 1995. p.5).

2. Generic - comparisons of business processes or functions that are very similar, regardless of industry (Oakland, 1994, p.182).

3. Internal - a comparison of internal operations by different departments within the same organisation (ibid., p.181).

4. Functional - comparisons to similar functions within the same broad industry, or to industry leaders (ibid., p.182).

5. Customer - the aim of the improvement programme is meeting and exceeding customer expectations.

The DTI has recently suggested this latter concept of customer benchmarking, which may be of particular relevance to the library and information sector. The DTI state:

> 'The benchmark is customer expectations. Customers develop their own benchmarks of performance when selecting and judging suppliers. The improvement programme is aimed at meeting and exceeding customer expectation.' (Department . . . March 1995 p.5)

It is already common practice in the LIS sector to use customer feedback and customer satisfaction surveys to measure the quality of service provision.

The findings of this project have revealed these methods to be widespread. However, it must be acknowledged that customer expectations can be unrealistic, and responses to them have to be tempered by constraints on resources. Despite these reservations, it would be worthwhile assessing the development of customer benchmarking in the library and information sector. Many LIS already use a range of techniques to obtain feedback from their users, and then take action to implement changes where possible. Customer benchmarking would merely formalise these activities, and could establish optimum levels of service on the lines of charters already in use in many public library services. These may or may not be considered desirable more generally to information services and their customers in the academic and special library fields.

Relevance

THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The application of benchmarking to the public sector, and in particular to service environments, has now been acknowledged in the literature and in practice. The DTI argues that benchmarking is not exclusive to international corporations, but that: 'many of the techniques transfer well to smaller businesses, the health sector, service organisations and government departments' (ibid., p.2). However, examples of the use of benchmarking are mostly taken from large, successful companies, despite the reiteration of its application to smaller organisations. Smaller organisations may be deterred either by a lack of resources to expend on quality management techniques, or require hard evidence to demonstrate the utility of benchmarking to their operations.

The National Health Service has taken a lead role in promoting the use of benchmarking in the public sector through the NHS Benchmarking Reference Centre based in Wales. Its Director, John Bullivant, has stated that there are many models of benchmarking models from which to choose (1994, ch.3, p.81) and that it is better to adapt the approach to suit the needs of the individual organisation, rather than reinvent benchmarking. He advocates learning from the experiences of others, and the use of benchmarking clubs and benchmarking visits (ibid., ch.3, p.85). Benchmarking is seen to be part of an overall quality programme as one method among many, which organisations may consider when looking at ways of improving performance.

ACADEMIC LIS

Throughout the literature, benchmarking is referred to as a means of improving an organisation's competitiveness. LIS managers in the academic sector may find this emphasis alien to their culture and work practices, and view themselves as remote from the world of commerce. This is understandable for those who grew up viewing education, libraries and knowledge as fundamental to a civilised nation, to which everyone, irrespective of income and status, has a right, free of charge at the point of delivery.

Times change and this ideal has largely disappeared. Education and information are now seen as tradable commodities - especially now that demand is high and funding is geared to research ratings and numbers of students. Obtaining funds from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is highly competitive, and institutions are having to compete to attract students and

resources. LIS have been identified as playing a fundamental role in the provision of quality education in two surveys discussed in the Follett Report (Joint . . , 1993 p.37). They may wish to improve existing services by focusing on internal processes, with the aim of identifying and eliminating non-value-adding procedures. These may have been in place for many years; often they entail unnecessary duplication of paper-based transactions to satisfy internal, departmental requirements. These processes have frequently 'always been done this way', but the original purpose for carrying out the procedure has long disappeared. Benchmarking offers a way of focusing on essential processes and eliminating unnecessary tasks, through comparison with other organisations. Benchmarking is essentially a learning experience. Participants reappraise their internal operations, so that all activities are firmly focused on the customer, and learn through an exchange of information with other organisations.

INDUSTRIAL / COMMERCIAL LIS

Benchmarking is of particular value to LIS in the industrial/commercial sector, as it builds on the success of others to improve performance. Benchmarking focuses on areas which are vital to the success of the organisation, and therefore has a positive impact on performance. This is critical if companies are to succeed in today's competitive marketplace. Fewer complaints and more satisfied customers can help establish a good reputation, and in the case of an LIS, it can raise its profile in the organisation. Those companies which value information as an essential resource will want to ensure that their information service is applying best practice.

Project Outcomes and Dissemination of Findings

The findings for the project will be fully described and evaluated in a final report to BLRD&D. In the interim period there will be various publications, which are currently in process, or are anticipated:

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT ITEMS

The first of these, a select bibliography, will soon be jointly published by FID and BLRD&D. This comprises around 200 annotated items under a range of quality related headings, and is aimed at busy library and information services managers interested in a compact guide to the literature. There is now such a wealth of literature on quality issues, that a bibliography which selected from this vast pool seemed essential to support managers in their implementation of quality management techniques. Items included range from books on general management to journal articles in the information field.

FURTHER PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

A position paper is currently being drafted, which outlines the current status of quality management for all sectors. This also identifies networking opportunities for library and information managers interested in quality related issues. The final results of the project will be also be disseminated through journal articles and further conference presentations.

Interim Project Findings to Date: the Questionnaire Survey

(i) AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the questionnaire survey was to establish the levels of implementation of quality management programmes in the library and information sector, and to evaluate which techniques and methodologies were currently being used. The questionnaire instrument was designed to complement that of the Quality Management and Public Libraries study, in order to ensure comparability of data collection.

(ii) RESPONSE RATE

The overall response rate to the questionnaire survey, which was addressed to heads of LIS, was 56.5%. For the academic sector it was 73%, whilst for the commercial sector it was 30%, although 28 additional questionnaires were returned uncompleted from commercial organisations.

The comments appended to various sections of the questionnaire provided the most illuminating data on attitudes to quality issues and barriers to change. These were all extrapolated and recorded for reference and analysis.

(iii) FINDINGS

1. Written Policy on quality at organisational level
   The first question aimed to establish how many organisations had written policies on quality. In both sectors (academic and commercial), 33% of respondents stated that they did have a written policy at organisational level, whilst 53% had no written policy. The remainder was made up of organisations in process of preparing a written policy (12%) and those who failed to respond to the question. There was little variation between the two sectors. Almost 26% of commercial sector

respondents had a written policy on quality, and 46% had no policy. Eleven per cent claimed to have a written policy in preparation.

2. Written policy on quality at library and information services level
We then sought to establish whether a written policy on quality existed at library and information service level. Here, the level of those answering positively that LIS did have a written policy was 12% for both sectors combined. Those without a written policy totalled 74%. In the commercial sector alone 10% had a written policy on quality, revealing that once again levels of implementation for both sectors were similar.

3. Formal Quality programme in place
When asked if there was a formal quality programme in place only 14% answered in the affirmative, although a larger number - 19% - stated that a programme was being prepared.

4. Quality initiatives
We also asked managers if they were involved in a range of quality initiatives. These were: TQM; Quality Circles; BS 5750; Customer Contracts; The Learning Organization; Investors in People (IIP), or any other unspecified methods. Investors in People proved the most popular initiative with 19% of respondents claiming to use it. Total quality management had been implemented by 13% of respondents, and Customer Contracts by around 12.5% of respondents.

5. Management initiatives
Respondents were also asked whether specific management initiatives had been introduced into their LIS. They were presented with seven possible initiatives: Management by Function; Management Information Systems; Cost Centres; Flatter Management Structures, Performance Indicators; Staff Appraisal and Team Working. Staff Appraisal and Team Working proved to be the most commonly used approaches, at 61% and 53% respectively.

6. Training
Of equal importance is specific training in quality for staff at all levels. However, 72.5% of LIS had no training programmes in place. Only 18% of respondents had training in quality for middle managers and paraprofessionals; whilst 14% offered training at senior manager level.

7. Measurement and evaluation of performance
Of particular relevance to this project was the use of benchmarking techniques. Benchmarking, along with usage statistics, performance indicators, user feedback and cross-charging were offered as methods which might currently be used to measure and evaluate performance in library and information services. Just over 7% claimed to be benchmarking (19 LIS in the academic sector, and one future benchmarker in the commercial sector, where they planned to introduce benchmarking in 1996). User feedback was the most widely used measure at 81%, closely followed by usage statistics at almost 79%.

8. Methods of communicating policies to staff
The responses to this question are significant, as effective communication is essential to the success of any organisation, especially if the organisation is embarking on a quality programme. Poor communications are frequently the cause of the failure of management initiatives. Respondents were asked which methods, from a list of nine, they used to communicate policies to LIS staff. Staff meetings were the most used method of communication (71% of respondents). 'On the job training' was the second most used method (54%), followed by appraisal schemes and managers 'walking the floor', each used by 40% of respondents.

Telephone interviews

A number of follow-up telephone interviews has been conducted to date to probe the findings further. These were divided equally between LIS in the commercial sector and the academic sector. They have provided insight into individual practice and cultures, and have served to highlight problems which hinder organisations trying to implement quality programmes.

THE ACADEMIC SECTOR: SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Institution A - Benchmarking was considered to be of relevance to the LIS sector by this interviewee. Informal benchmarking is carried out through analysis of the annual reports and reviews of other universities, and through contacts. Formalising procedures was viewed as a natural progression. A barrier to implementation was considered to be lack of time, and problems associated with the transition from old methods to new quality approaches. The latter problem required cultural change, which was deemed difficult as there were many long-serving members of staff (referred to as 'platform performers'), who were opposed to change, so that the institution could make little progress until these people retired or left. A new Vice-Chancellor was about to take up appointment, with the expectation that this

would effect change. However, the LIS was viewed as being well-placed, with representation on all the 'right' committees, and it had support from higher management.

Institution B - the interviewee at this institution also felt that benchmarking was relevant to the LIS, and expressed a keen interest in 'evaluating others'. Their current practice was to arrange visits and exchanges of staff with other institutions. The purpose of this is to gain knowledge of how a host organisation works. They had a formal twinning arrangement with a counterpart in the USA, and planned to exploit the expertise of the US institution in an area which was new to them. This institution had both a mission statement and a five-year strategic plan, and perceived themselves as being advanced in their use of performance indicators and user satisfaction surveys. The interviewee was very positive about looking outside of the LIS community for ideas. He stated that they had looked at the example of Marks and Spencer when deciding to close the library for an hour on one morning a week, in order to carry out staff training. Prior to this they had thought such actions were inappropriate, and would be opposed by users. He also expressed the view that the LIS sector was already very advanced, and that the progress which had been made, for example in the introduction of IT, had been underestimated.

Institution C - Benchmarking was judged, by the interviewee, to be relevant to the LIS sector with the proviso that the term meant 'finding best practice and then emulating and comparing with this'. If, on the other hand, benchmarking was closely tied to standards and prescriptive then it was judged to be of no relevance or use to the LIS sector. Performance indicators, the interviewee felt, had been effective in generating standards in the past. However, performance indicators needed to be tailored to local aims and objectives, so that similarities were highlighted. This would overcome the common reaction of the LIS profession - which was to claim their organisation was 'different', which precluded comparison.

THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR: SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

There was found to be a diversity of cultures and practices in the sample organisations interviewed in the commercial sector. Most interviewees considered benchmarking to be relevant to the LIS sector. Some expressed reservations, for example that it *ought* to be relevant, but might not be practical, as considerable time and resources needed to be allocated for it to be implemented. Several expressed the view that the aims of benchmarking partners should be similar; if organisations had different purposes then their processes would differ, and comparisons would be difficult. Specific processes, eg. document delivery and journal circulation, were perceived as being best suited to benchmarking exercises, as they were easy to monitor.

Organisation A - This organisation had both a written policy on quality and a formal quality programme, and had disbanded its corporate centralised library. The one remaining library professional had been given a new job title, which reflected her new 'support' and 'secretarial' status. Holdings had been dispersed to individual departments, according to their relevance to the work of that department. In-house qualified librarians were no longer employed, and information requests were outsourced to information brokers.

Organisation B - The LIS in this organisation anticipated the doubling of the level of enquiries - currently around 10,000 a year - with only one new member of staff being appointed to help deal with the increase. They were acting as a pilot project for a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) scheme, known as 'Technical Transfer Services'. This project involves extending the organisation's high profile enquiry service, with access to a collection of technical information resources, to non-members. The aim of this initiative is to provide small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with information on those examples of best practice which would enable them to improve their services and products. The interviewee expressed concern regarding the impact this initiative could have on quality. The organisation's 'bottom line' was to view all non-members as potential members, a view with which the interviewee agreed. However, enquiries outside the expertise of the organisation were anticipated, which would require referral elsewhere. This could impact on the reputation of the information service, if referrals proved unsatisfactory. This LIS has well-documented, formalised procedures, for a range of services, as well as a quality manual. They have been involved in BS 5750 and Investors in People (IIP) initiatives. However, there is now a genuine concern for the quality and reputation of the service with the development of a new element in service delivery, which would fall outside the direct control of the information service.

Organisation C - The LIS in this organisation can be categorised as a 'special' library. Here the organisa-

tion was undergoing what was termed 'soft privatisation'. This involved plans to merge the organisation with a university. Original plans for market testing and service level agreements had been jettisoned, due to the uncertainty of the future of the unit. Redundancies were anticipated following the merger. The interviewee stressed that the organisation was driven by financial concerns alone; no consideration was given to customer satisfaction. He expressed the view that teleworking might be adopted to save costs; one worker was already working in France and communicating with the home-base by electronic mail. He also added that many organisations in the commercial sector were only planning six months ahead. It can be inferred that this is partly due to the recession, and to insecurity about the future. Libraries, he suggested, were commonly perceived to be too expensive to maintain, as well as taking up expensive space. They were therefore viewed as prime candidates for cost-cutting exercises.

Organisation D - An interviewee from this organisation mentioned the familiar 'what's in it for me' question, which is often posed by managers, when evaluating new management initiatives. She felt that benchmarking, and quality programmes in general, had to have some easily identifiable and quantifiable gain attached to them, in order to justify the time and resources which would need to be allocated to them.

Conclusions

(i) BENCHMARKING MODELS FOR THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SECTOR

The approach which has been adopted by the LIS taking part in the benchmarking exercise for this project is a bottom-up approach. Processes, which have been identified as critical to the success of the service, have been selected for measurement and comparison with other LIS - irrespective of sector. The two functions chosen are interlibrary loans and enquiry services. This approach is commensurate with the comments made by interviewees that processes which are easy to monitor and measure should be chosen for benchmarking exercises. The results of this part of the study have not yet been analysed. The data are now being collected and the 'demonstrator' library and information services have yet to report on their experiences.

Customer benchmarking would also be worth evaluating for use by the information sector. Libraries already use customer feedback and user surveys to a large extent. It might, therefore, be feasible and cost-effective to set benchmarks based on this feedback, with the proviso that the benchmark be both realistic and attainable after improvements have been effected. Where user expectations were unreasonably high, adjustments would have to be made to the benchmark, and the reasons fully explained to users.

(ii) BENCHMARKING AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

It is thought unlikely that benchmarking could be implemented by any LIS where there was no quality programme in place. Benchmarking is a 'quality' tool, and the aim of this project has been to evaluate it within the context of quality management.

Quality management has been judged to be beneficial to the library and information sector by many library and information managers, by academics and by managers in the commercial sector. However, no one 'right' approach or model has yet been identified. LIS serve a variety of communities and organisations. Each has its own culture, problems, and resource limitations. A quality model which is in harmony with the needs of most LIS is required - a considerable difficulty, given that LIS are so varied. It needs to be flexible and easily adapted to different sectors. It needs to focus on the human interfaces which are so vital to the success of most LIS. The self-assessment model, as developed by the British Quality Foundation (BQF) and the European Foundation for quality management, (EFQM) seems to be the most appropriate model at the present time (British . . , 1994 p.8). This focuses largely on the 'people' element of organisations and thus seems well suited to the service environment, and to a variety of organisational settings. The BQF/EFQM model is shown in Appendix 14.

(iii) TRAINING

The importance of training cannot be overestimated. Managers need to be both informed and committed for a quality programme to be successful. They are then able to form teams, empower process owners, and motivate their staff. Front-line staff, in particular, need to be motivated and convinced of the value of quality methodologies. Training in customer care is as vital as knowledge of the information service. The image and reputation of the library is linked to the customer's first impressions, and it is front-line staff who constantly interact with the customer.

Training in quality tools and techniques is important for all levels of staff. They need to understand why certain procedures are in place, and the value of taking a broad view of the service as a whole.

Those who deal with one process day in and day out tend to become isolated and lose contact with the overall workings of the unit. Quality management involves meetings, staff involvement, team work, and cross-functional co-operation. Above all, it requires excellent communications at all levels. By raising staff awareness of the impact of their contribution to the effectiveness of the service, they become more motivated and less isolated. The questionnaire highlighted these issues. LIS with quality programmes in place often listed the benefits of heightened staff awareness of their role and input to the organisation.

Whilst the project is yet to be completed, and the data from the demonstrator projects are not yet available for analysis, some tentative overall conclusions have been possible.

(iv) OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

1. Benchmarking can only be effective in those LIS which already have a commitment to quality management, and have begun to implement quality management practices.
2. Many LIS still have some way to go before quality management - as practised in the commercial sector - can be implemented. There appears to be little commitment to quality management evident amongst many of the managers surveyed.
3. However, there is, paradoxically one might argue, evidence of continuing interest in measurement and comparison, the key elements in benchmarking. Performance measurement and the use of informal comparisons, together with the continuing use of comparative measures by funders, have been growing in significance in recent years. The use of SCONUL and COPOL performance measures, and the emphasis on accountability - to users as well as funders - have been important in shifting the perceptions of LIS managers.
   There appears now to be the need for a further shift to encompass the more holistic approval of a quality management programme. This would enable LIS to support more fully the range of quality management techniques, particularly best practice and other forms of benchmarking.

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Appendices

Content of OHPs used at the Conference presentation.

Appendix 1

Methodology

- Surveys: questionnaire
  telephone interviews
- Literature searching
- Demonstrator projects

Appendix 2

Definitions

- Measurement
- Comparison

Appendix 3

Checklist of Procedures

- Identify process
- Document / map sub-processes
- Measure critical success factors
- Analyse results
- Choose benchmarking partners
- Identify 'best practice'

Appendix 4

Types of Benchmarking

- Competitive	competitor to competitor comparisons for product/function of interest
- Generic	similar business processes and functions regardless of industry
- Internal	internal operations of different departments within same organisation
- Functional	similar functions in same broad industry/industry leaders

(Oakland, J. *Total quality management* (1994) Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. 181-182)

- Customer	the benchmark is customer expectations

(Department of Trade & Industry (March 1995) *Benchmarking the challenge. A practical guide to business improvement*. p.5)

Appendix 5

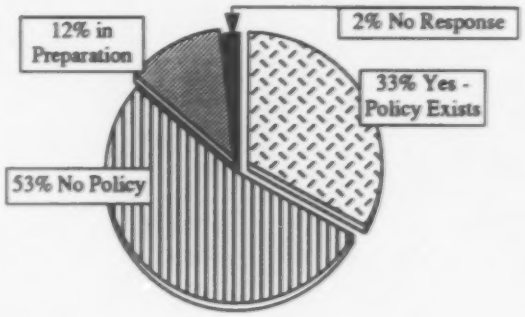
Relevance

- Public sector
- Academic sector
- Commercial / Industrial sector

Appendix 6

Question: Does your organisation have a written policy on quality?

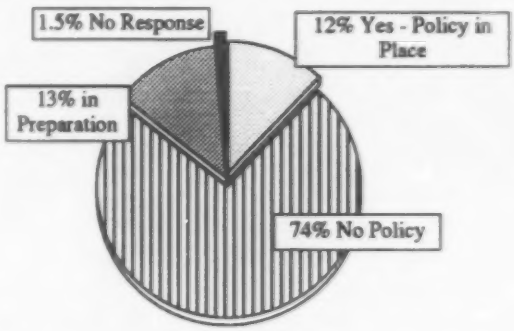
Written Policy on Quality at Organisational Level



Appendix 7

Question: Does your organisation have a written policy on quality?

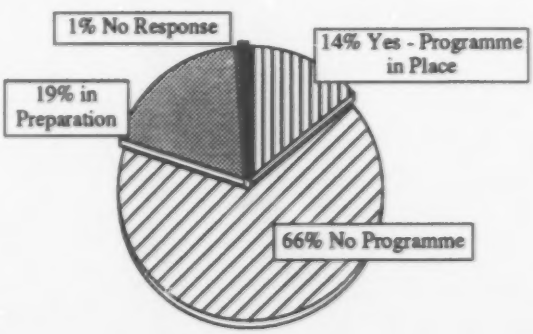
Written Policy on Quality at Library and Information Services Level



Appendix 8

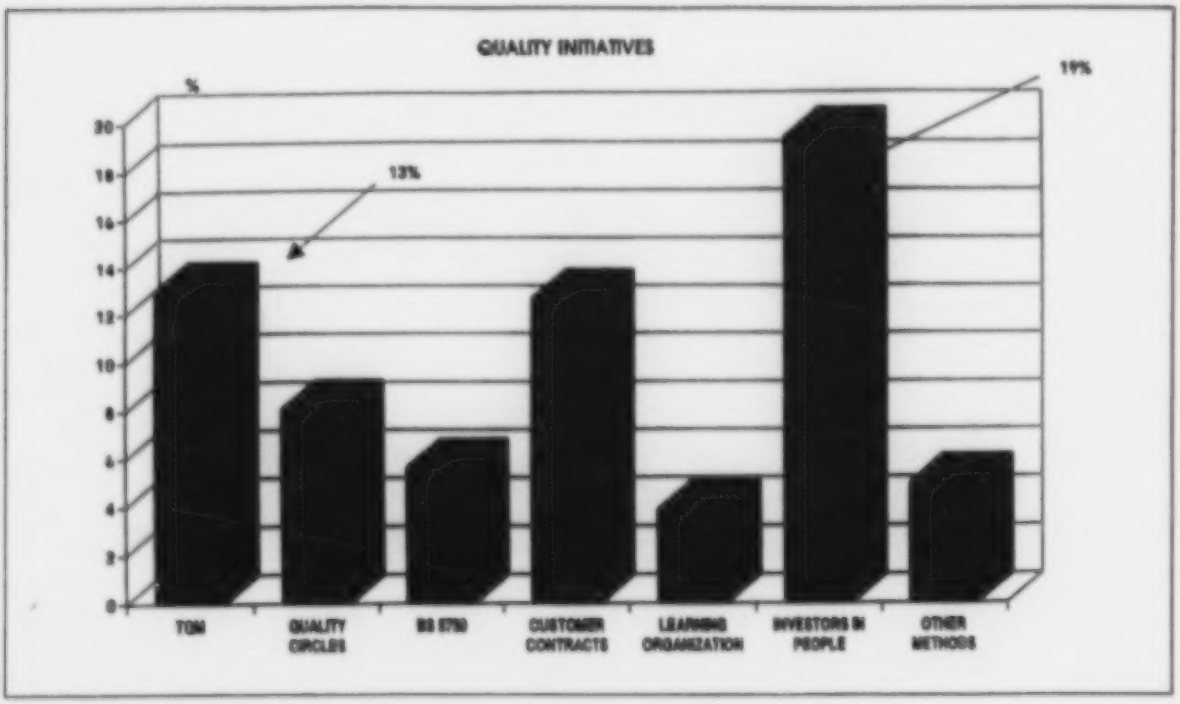
Question: Do you have a formal quality programme in place?

Formal Quality Programme in Place



Appendix 9

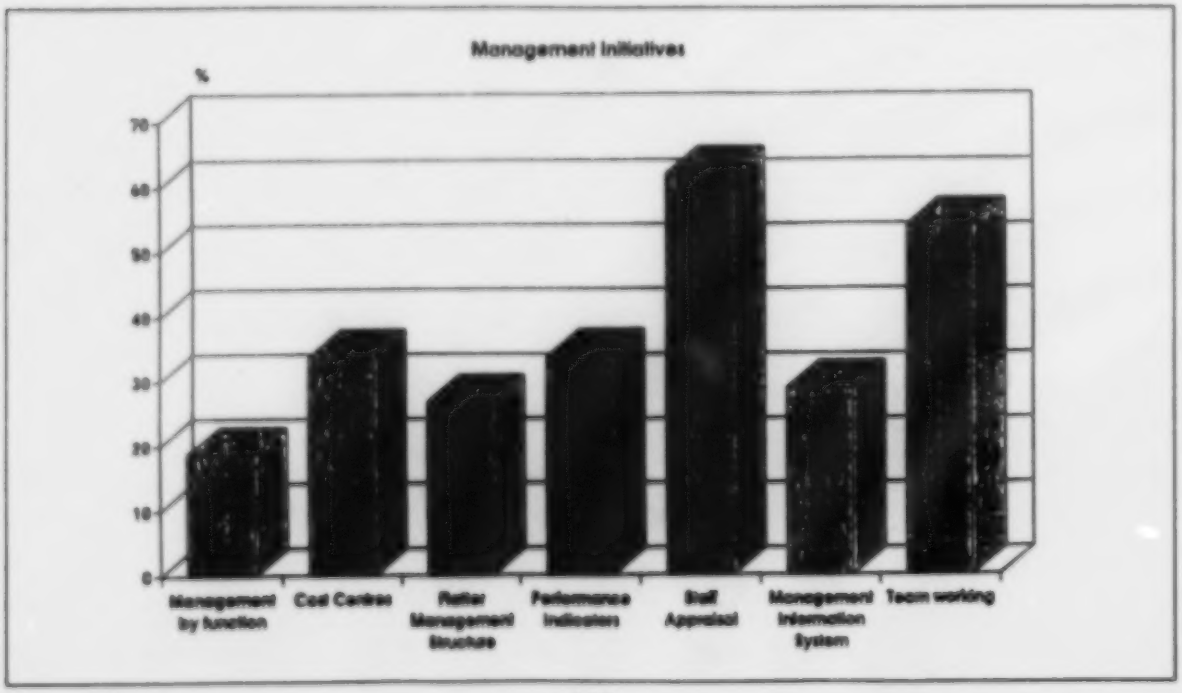
Quality Initiatives used in Academic and Commercial Library and Information Services



Appendix 10

Question: Has your library and information service implemented any of the following?

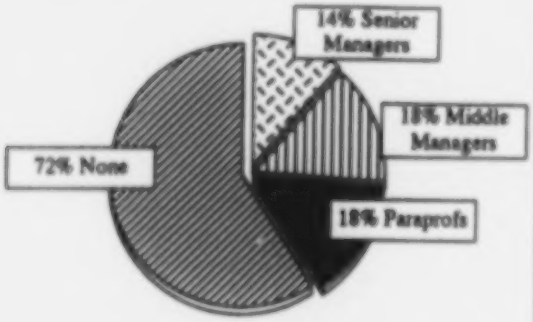
Management Initiatives



Appendix 11

Question: Are there training programmes in quality for staff?

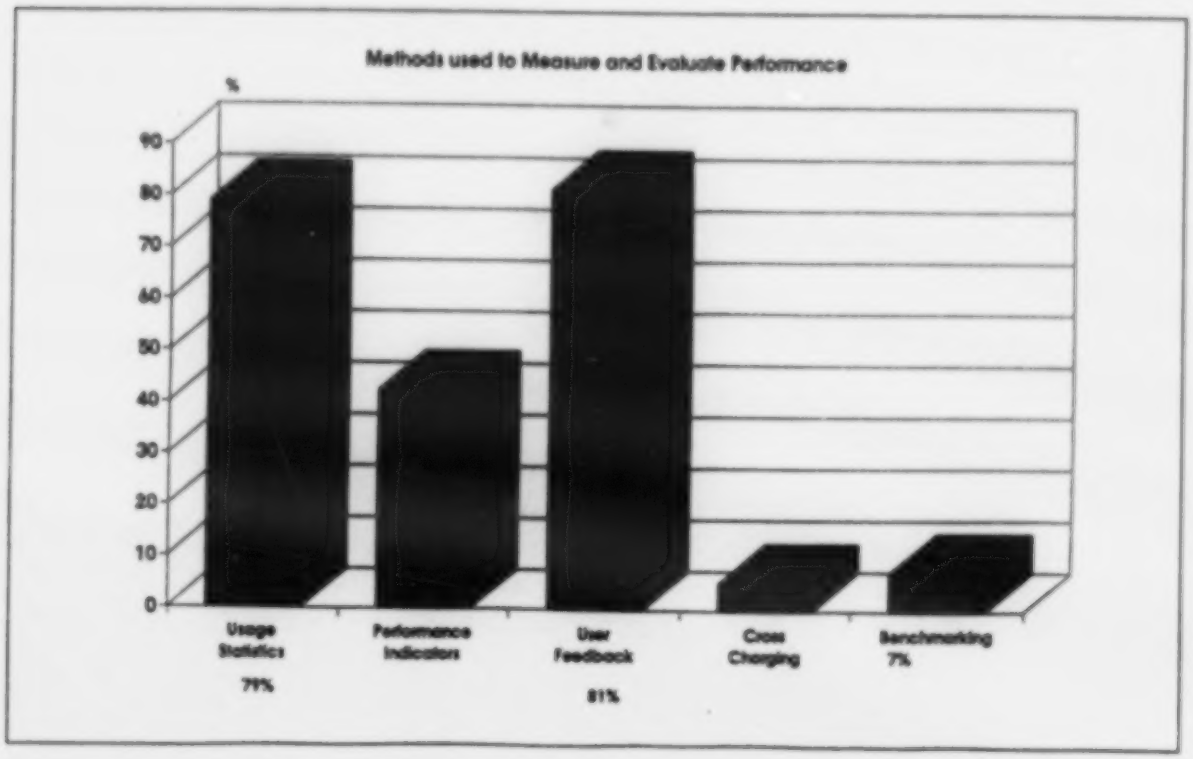
Staff Training in Quality



Appendix 12

Question: Which of the following methods does your LIS use to measure and/or evaluate performance?

Measures used to Measure and Evaluate Performance



Appendix 13

Communication - How Policies are Communicated to LIS Staff

- Staff Meetings	71%
- On Job Training	54%
- Appraisal Scheme	40.5%
- Managers - 'Walking the floor'	40%
- Training Courses	37.5%
- Mission Statement	35.5%
- Team Briefings	30.5%
- Bulletins / Newsletters	30%
- Quality Groups	9%

Appendix 15

Future Publication

Quality Management Issues: a Select Bibliography for Library and Information Services Managers

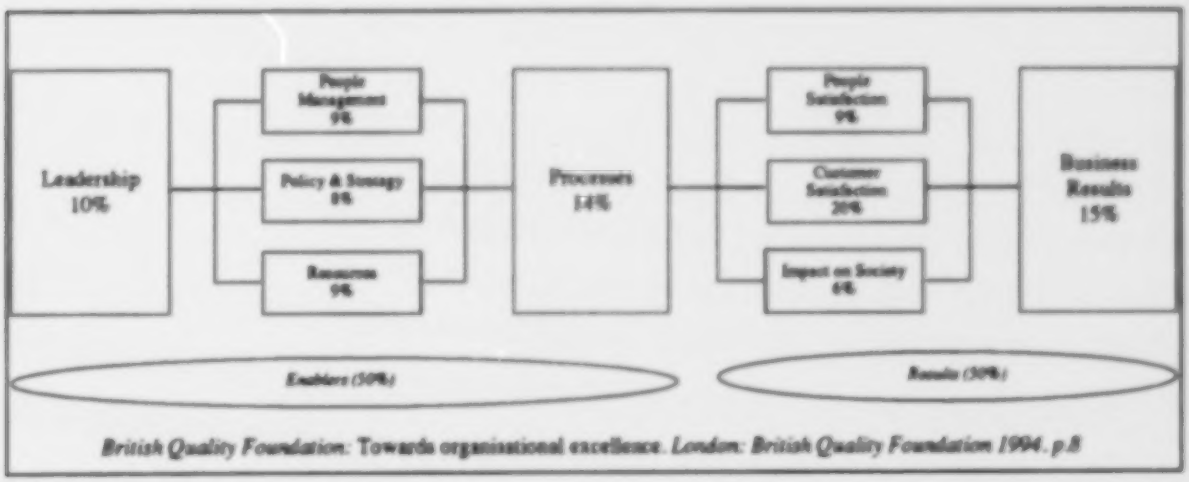
FID Occasional Paper 10
British Library R&D Report 6220

Compiled by Penny Garrod
Margaret Kinnell Evans

FID: The Hague 1995
ISBN 92 66 00 7102
[Not yet published]

Appendix 14

UK / European Model for Total Quality



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